

EU legislation: Genetically modified organisms (GMOs)

Introduction



Genetically modified organisms (GMOs) can be defined as organisms in which the genetic material (DNA) has been altered in a way that does not occur naturally by mating or natural recombination.

The EU introduced legislation on GMOs in the early 1990's to protect the environment and the health of the consumers, while at the same time providing a single market within the EU. The legislation has since been extended and refined to better meet the original aim while providing clear procedures.

Outline of the legislation

When first introduced in EU legislation, GMOs formed part of the legislation for novel foods. In September 2003 two Regulations that separate the legislation on GMOs from other novel foods were published:

- **Regulation 1829/2003** on genetically modified food and feed
- **Regulation 1830/2003** on traceability and labelling of genetically modified organisms

The Regulations complement each other and together form the EU legislation on GMOs. The legislation came into force on 18 April 2004 and is in force in all EU Member States.

The present legislation on GMOs is based on the previous EU legislation, but is expanded in scope to include feed. In addition, stricter labelling requirements are laid down. An outline of the legislation is here presented, where deviations from the previous EU legislation on GMOs are pointed out.

Scope

Regulation (EC) 1829/2003 establishes procedures for the authorisation and supervision of genetically modified food and feed, whereas the previous legislation only concerned GMO in food.

Traceability

Requirements for traceability of a GMO through the process chain are laid down. Regulation 1830/2003 states that at the first stage of placing a product consisting of or containing GMOs on the EU market, operators must ensure that written information stating that the product contains GMOs is transmitted with the product. Operators in all subsequent stages must transmit this information on to all subsequent operators.

➔ [For more information on](#) general traceability requirements for food in the EU, please see the related documents.

Labelling

It is required to label all food and feed which consist of, contain or are produced from GMOs. This does not apply to food and feed containing a maximum of 0.9% GMOs when the ingredients are considered individually. The previous legislation was based on detectability in the final product, but under the current Regulations all GMO products are covered, including products where GMOs can not be detected after processing. The purpose for this extended coverage is to allow the consumer to make informed choices.

For pre-packaged products, as well as non-pre-packaged products for the final producer, the following text must appear on the label: "This product contains genetically modified organisms" or "This product contains genetically modified [name of organism(s)]".

Please note that besides these labelling provisions for genetically modified foodstuffs, also general labelling requirements for food exist!

➔ [For more information on EU food labelling legislation](#), please see the related documents.

Authorisation

In order to market a GMO food or a GMO feed product in the EU market, an authorisation is required. In agreement with the requirements in Regulation 1829/2003, detailed procedures are established in Regulation (EC) 641/2004. The application for an authorisation must be submitted to the competent authority in a Member State, who will pass it on to the EU level so that in the end a decision covering the whole EU is reached. If a product can be used as both food and feed, one application is enough. Each GMO receives an identifier, which must be mentioned on the product label. The European Commission keeps a register of all authorised food and feed. Authorisations are renewable for 10-year periods.

➔ [For detailed information on the authorisation procedure](#), please refer to the external link to Regulation (EC) 641/2004.